

## **LGBTQ Iranian Outreach & Engagement Project**

### **FY 17-18 CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT**

#### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The LGBTQ Iranian Outreach and Engagement Project was developed by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning, Intersex, Two-Spirit (LGBTQI2-S) Underserved Cultural Communities (UsCC) subcommittee with the objective of engaging, empowering, enlisting, and enlightening the LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ Iranian community, as well as to promote mental health services, reduce stigma, and increase the capacity of the public mental health system in Los Angeles County. The purpose of this project was to develop and implement an Iranian LGBTQ Outreach Campaign, which included a series of eight (8) health and wellness workshops; and a media campaign targeting Iranian LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ community members through local Iranian radio programs, magazines/newspapers, and radio Public Service Announcements (PSA's).

This Project was implemented in four (4) phases starting January 8, 2018 to September 30, 2018. Below is a description of each phase:

#### **Phase One:**

During phase one of this project, the project coordinator developed a twelve page, detailed outline of all the talking points that would be covered during the workshops as well as on the radio programs. A list of sixty-seven questions were also developed (all derived from the talking-points covered in the outline) that would be used during the workshops and radio programs when interviewing our featured guests. An additional six-page document, detailing two break-out session activities was also developed by the coordinator to be used during the workshops. Promotional materials such as lapel pins, stickers and flyers were also created by the project coordinator in order to be handed out to community members, thus furthering our outreach. All of this material was reviewed and approved by LADMH.

The project coordinator also developed a 2-page Resource Guide that was specific to the cultural and linguistic needs of Iranian LGBTQ community members in Los Angeles County. The Resource Guide included contact information for emergency services, including the LACDMH 24-hour ACCESS line; crisis hotlines and warm lines; formal and informal mental health services and support services; inpatient and outpatient substance abuse programs and services; low cost/no cost medical/HIV/AIDS services; employment placement and job training services; and legal assistance programs.

The Resource guide focused on the areas in Los Angeles county where large groups of Iranian individuals are concentrated as well as services that geared specifically toward Iranian and Iranian LGBTQ individuals.

Finally, the project coordinator developed a pre/post survey questionnaire. The questionnaire included five (5) close ended questions and utilized a Likert Scale in order to conduct a matched pair analysis of the information gained by participants from the workshops and the degree to which the workshops may have affected the participants' perception of stigma in relation to LGBTQ issues.

During phase one, the project coordinator also identified and reached out to twenty (20) individuals (Iranian LGBTQ advocates and activists, as well as Iranian celebrities and ally's) who would be featured in the workshops and media campaign. In addition, the project coordinator reached out to a number of local Iranian magazines and newspapers in order to negotiate rates for publishing articles. Local Iranian radio station, KIRN 670 am was also contacted in order to negotiate radio programs and PSA's. A number of venues, including local universities and colleges were also contacted in order to secure location and dates for the workshops. The first phase of the project was noted to have been completed on schedule.

#### Phase Two:

During the second phase of the project, the program coordinator finalized dates and locations for the health and wellness workshops, and confirmed participation for the individuals that would be featured speakers during those workshops. The series of workshops was titled "Iranian LGBTQ: Profiles in Success and the Allies who Support Them." This title was selected in order to counter the cultural belief many Iranian's maintain that LGBTQ individuals are suffering from an illness and/or perversion that does not allow them to live successful and fulfilling lives. It was also important to highlight the significance of ally's and promote the value and need for ally's in this movement. The goal of the workshops was to allow the Iranian community to increase their knowledge about LGBTQ issues; gain an understanding between myths and facts; and hear personal stories and struggles that Iranian LGBTQ individuals have experienced.

The workshops were each three hours long and included a half-hour of mingling/refreshments; 1-hour interview segment with our featured guests; 40-minute break-out session, where participants were divided into small groups. Each group was facilitated by a volunteer mental health professional who lead participants in a small group activity that allowed them to discuss and process their feelings about what they had heard during the interview segment; and a 20-minute question and answer segment where participants got to ask questions from the featured guests and the program coordinator. All of the workshops were facilitated and moderated by the program coordinator (who is a licensed mental health professional with extensive experience and expertise in working with the Iranian and Iranian LGBTQ community).

Pre/post tests were given to participants as they signed in to the workshop. Workshop volunteers instructed participants to fill out the pre-test upon receiving it and to fill out the post test at the end of the workshop after the question and answer segment. During

break-out sessions, the volunteer facilitators reminded participants to complete the post tests at the end of the workshop. Volunteer facilitators also briefly reviewed and handed out the resource directory to each participant during the break-out sessions. Other promotional materials, such as lapel pins and stickers were also distributed to participants during the workshops.

The workshops were mostly conducted in English (with Persian words and phrases incorporated as needed). There was simultaneous translation to Persian (via headphones and a live translator) available for individuals who requested it.

The workshops were promoted to the public through social media (Facebook, telegram, Iranianhotline.com, Instagram and twitter); through email lists of featured individuals as well as other organizations including Raha International, JQ International, and PARS Equality Center; radio announcements; and flyers that were distributed at community events, schools, doctors' offices and local Iranian grocery stores.

Below is a list of workshop dates, locations, and featured speakers:

Date	Location	Featured Speakers
March 5, 2018	Beverly Hills Public Library	Dr. Houman Sarshar and Mrs. Homa Sarshar
March 8, 2018	UCLA	Shervin Khorramian and Dr. Saba Soumekh
March 27, 2018	Beverly Hills Public Library	Mastaneh Moghadam
April 24, 2018	Beverly Hills Public Library	Abdie Nazemian and Mojean Aria
May 3, 2018	Cal State Northridge	Matthew Nouriel and Niko Toubia
June 13, 2018	Valley Beth Shalom in Encino	Arya Marvazy and Azad Marvazy
July 31, 2018	Beverly Hills Public Library	Shabnam Paidarfard and Elaheh Nejat
August 26, 2018	Private Residence in West Los Angeles	Shervin Khorramian and Mastaneh Moghadam

#### Phase Three:

During the third phase of the project, the program coordinator wrote three, 30-second public services announcements and six magazine articles. All PSA's and magazine articles were reviewed and approved by LADMH. All were then sent for translation into Persian.

The PSA's were recorded and aired two-hundred (200) times on local Iranian radio station, KIRN 670 am, between the dates of February 19, 2018 and September 6, 2018. The PSA's aired between the hours of 6am to 11pm, seven days a week.

In addition to the PSA's, the program coordinator negotiated a deal with KIRN 670 am, where we were given air time to broadcast twenty-six (26), 23-minute radio programs. The programs aired every Sunday from 2pm to 2:30pm, starting February 25, 2018 to September 2, 2018. Each program was moderated by the program host, Mojgan Rahbar (who is an experienced journalist/radio personality). She also served as producer for the series of radio programs. The project coordinator was also present at every radio program, serving as a mental health professional and cultural expert. In addition, every radio program included one or two featured guests. These guests consisted of Iranian LGBTQ activists as well as celebrity allies. Below are the names of all the radio program's featured guests:

1. Houman Sarshar
2. Joseph Harounian
3. Abdi Nazemian
4. Hedyeh Rezai
5. Ali Pourtash
6. Alaleh Kamran
7. Parviz Sayyad
8. Shabnam Paidarfard
9. Elaheh Nejat
10. Mona Khadem
11. Shervin Khorramian
12. Dr. Venus Zand
13. Maryam Diba
14. Sima Toubia
15. Mahnaz Kamran
16. Saeid Termechi
17. Shahriar Tavakoli
18. Shahrzad Ardalan

All radio programs were promoted via flyers that were created and distributed at community events, schools, and local Iranian grocery stores and doctors' offices, as well as on social media (Facebook, telegram, Iranianhotline.com, Instagram and twitter) and through email lists of featured guests.

The program coordinator negotiated a deal where local Iranian publication, Tehran Magazine, would print a four-page article about the challenges and successes of the Iranian LGBTQ community. In response to the success of the radio programs, and to our great surprise, Tehran Magazine contacted the program coordinator and stated that they would like to feature the Iranian LGBTQ article on their front cover for their June 8, 2018 issue. This marked the first time ever that a mainstream Iranian publication featured the LGBTQ community on their front cover.

The program coordinator was then contacted by local Iranian publication, Javanan Magazine, who offered to print five articles regarding the Iranian LGBTQ community. This was also tremendous news given the fact that when we originally approached Javanan Magazine about printing one article, they were reluctant to do so. The Javanan articles were published in their August 17th, August 24th, August 31st, and September 7th issues. The publication of the fifth article has gotten delayed by Javanan Magazine (for reasons that are internal to their business), but they have promised to publish article number five in their November 16, 2018 issue.

#### Phase Four:

The fourth phase of the project consists of the collection of all workshop sign-in sheets and pre/post tests. All documentation was reviewed and demographic information was tallied. In-person interviews were also conducted with volunteer facilitators in order to gather qualitative information about the workshops, community feedback, and volunteer feedback. All quantitative and qualitative data that was gathered was included in the Project Outcomes and Summary Report.

## **PROJECT RESULTS**

The project began with the development of a detailed outline that included talking points such as: myth's versus facts about LGBTQ issues; concepts related to privilege and oppression; concept of micro-aggressions; LGBTQ and mental health; challenges around the coming out process; cultural themes around LGBTQ identity and coming out; importance of ally's and who they are; LGBTQ terminology; and accessing culturally appropriate mental health services. Although the Statement of Work (SOW) never required for us to create this detailed outline, it soon became apparent that we need a guide, that DMH can approve, that we can work off of when asking questions to our featured guests and during all of the workshops and the radio programs.

This outline, along with the subsequent list of questions and list of small group break-out activities that were all created based on the outline, proved to be culturally appropriate for the Iranian community. In feedback from community members and volunteers, it was stated by the majority that the information that was covered in the workshops and the radio programs was very informative and directly applied to the needs of the Iranian and Iranian LGBTQ community living in Los Angeles. One volunteer stated "The information being given, specifically the myth's versus fact's segment, was so informative and thought provoking and really tackled all the questions that kept coming up during the small group break-out sessions for participants." A workshop participant stated that learning about micro-aggressions and the impact that they have on members of the Iranian LGBTQ community was, "something I had never taken notice of in myself or others." She went on to state that "it never was clear to me why LGBTQ individuals suffer from higher rates of depression and anxiety. I always thought it was because they are gay. Now I understand it's because of family and social pressures and the judgments and criticism of others that they are prone to develop such emotional and mental health issues."

One of the featured guests stated, "the questions that were asked of me were very thought provoking and gave me insight into myself that I hadn't realized before." Another featured guest stated, "I never thought in my wildest dreams that I would be able to stand in front of a large group of Iranian people and talk about my sexuality and the challenges I have faced in such an

open and honest way. I felt very empowered doing it and people's reactions to what I was saying helped heal a lot of old wounds that I never thought would be healed." All of the featured guests repeatedly acknowledged the work that was being done as one of the most significant and "life changing" experiences they have had. They continually expressed their gratitude and pointed out how transforming this campaign has been not only for them, but for their families and the community. One person ecstatically reported that, "for the first time ever, my parents have attended the workshop that I was featured in and they actually came up to me and acknowledged my struggles and told me that they were proud of me."

An Iranian mother of a gay son stated that ever since her son came out to her and her husband last year, she was suffering from a deep depression and a sense of loss that she just couldn't shake. She stated that, "as if by some miracle, I randomly came upon one of the radio programs and couldn't believe that this was being discussed so openly on Iranian radio." She went on to say, "I immediately decided to tell my husband and we both attended one of the workshops and to our utter surprise and amazement I saw one of my best friends at the lecture. At that moment, for the first time, we both disclosed to each other that we have gay sons and the sense of comfort and relief that this brought to me and my family was priceless." The woman continued to express how isolating it was to keep this "big secret" from everyone and that she now realizes how shaming it was for her son.

An Iranian gay adult male stated that for the first time since he came out almost 7 years ago, he sat down with his family and they listened to one of the radio programs together and "we actually had a civil and very emotional conversation about what we had faced and what we continue to struggle with." He stated that although his parents had known that he was gay, they had never approached him to discuss this issue, other than to tell him to keep it a secret. He expressed amazement and much appreciation that the radio programs created the opportunity and sparked dialogue for him and his parents to finally communicate their feelings.

One of the most poignant responses to the radio programs was a phone call we received from an Iranian mother who had lost her gay son to suicide over a decade ago. In the phone conversation, the mother expressed her great sorrow that programs like this did not exist back when her son came out and how she regrets her reaction and the actions that she took upon finding out about her son's sexual orientation. After sharing her story, the mother stated how she wished she could tell others of what she had gone through in order to prevent it from happening to anyone else. At that point, the program coordinator asked this mother if she would be willing to come on the radio and share her story. The mother replied that it would be too difficultly for her to verbally share her story on the radio, but that she would be willing to write a letter telling her story and that perhaps we could then read her letter on the radio. The program coordinator received the letter and the letter was read on the radio program.

The radio program where this letter was read received over 50 phone calls and emails from the community. This mother's letter had a profound impact on not only parents who have children that are LGBTQ, but also on the general public. One listener called and stated, "I don't have any family members who are gay and whenever this subject came up, it would bother me why anyone needs to talk about it or come out of the closet. However, upon hearing this letter from this

mother I suddenly was able to connect to what this child and mother were going through and now I understand the importance of discussing these matters.”

Another Iranian older-adult male stated that “All my life I had been told that being gay is disgusting and an illness. However, when I heard the radio program where you read the letter from the mother, it caught my attention and the following week, when I heard the great actor, Parviz Sayyad on the program talking about homosexuality as a normal part of life, I realized that there must be more to this than what I had been taught and it sparked a curiosity in me to read up and educate myself further.”

The response that we received from the magazine articles was equally as awe-inspiring. Specifically, since when we first reached out to local Iranian publications, we got turned down by a number of them, who stated “we cannot risk losing readers by publishing such controversial articles.” Another publication stated, “Our readers would be offended by such articles and we would get too many negative phone calls and we are not willing to do that.” Thus we were grateful when Tehran Magazine, though reluctantly, at least told us that they would be willing to print the article. And we were overjoyed when the owner of the magazine got in touch with us (after listening to several of the radio programs) and stated that he would be willing to feature our article on the cover. The response from the Iranian LGBTQ community was overwhelming when they saw the cover of this mainstream, popular Iranian magazine. One Iranian Lesbian female stated, “I can’t tell you what it means to witness this, 20 years ago I thought I was the only one and it was a difficult journey. So incredibly proud to stand tall and witness this.”

Getting on the cover of Tehran Magazine also opened the door for another very popular, mainstream Iranian publication, Javanan Magazine, to get in touch with us and offer to print not just one, but five (5) articles about the Iranian LGBTQ experience in their magazine. The feedback from the publication of the magazine articles as well as the radio programs didn’t just come from Iranians who reside in Los Angeles, we got over 20 phone calls and emails from Iranians residing in other states, such as New York, Chicago, Arizona, and Nevada; as well as other countries like the UK, Canada and Iran, telling us about the impact that these programs had on their families and asking us if we would be doing workshops in their area. We even received a phone call from an Iranian professor who teaches at Columbia University, who stated that these articles and radio programs made her realize how important it is to discuss LGBTQ issues with her students and have them as a regular part of class discussions.

The Resource Guide also fulfilled the guidelines set by Department of Mental Health in the Statement of Work. The volunteers and community members appeared to really like the fact that the guide made for easy access and knowledge about agencies and organizations that can help with their mental health and social service needs.

The community members and workshop participants also gave positive feedback in regards to the Pre/Post Tests. They felt that the questions were good indicators of where community members’ beliefs and understanding lied in relation to the Iranian LGBTQ community. They stated that the results of the pre/post tests confirmed for them how much the Iranian community needed the information that was presented to them.

The pre-tests indicated that the majority of community members (74%) either “agreed,” “strongly agreed” or had “no opinion” in regards to the statement, “Being an LGBTQ ally means that I have to go to parades and publicly speak on the subject.” The post tests indicate a decrease in the number of participants (18%) who “strongly agreed,” “agreed” or had “no opinion” about this statement, indicating that the majority (80%) had a better understanding about the fact that being an ally isn’t only about going to parades and public speaking, but can be subtler and supportive in nature.

The pre-tests also indicated that a large number of community members (67%), either “agreed,” “strongly agreed” or had “no opinion” in regards to the statement, “The verbal and non-verbal messages that our community sends to LGBTQ people make no difference to their mental and emotional well-being.” In contrast, the post-tests indicate that only 15% of participants were in agreement or had no opinion about this statement; and the majority of participants (85%) had gained an understanding that verbal and non-verbal messages do make a difference to the mental and emotional wellbeing of LGBTQ individuals.

In regards to the statement, “When people speak publicly about being LGBTQ, it puts our children and young adults at risk of becoming gay,” again, the pre-tests indicated that 61.5% of participants either “agreed,” “strongly agreed,” or had “no opinion” in regards to this statement; while the post-tests indicated that the overwhelming majority (87%) either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with this statement, thus confirming the fact that the workshops educated people about the facts versus the myths about homosexuality.

Participants again indicated that the workshops helped them gain awareness of the facts about LGBTQ identity, when the majority (89%) of them “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the statement, “Homosexuality can be cured if the person goes to therapy” on the post-tests; in contrast to the 68% of participants who initially “agreed,” “strongly agreed,” or had “no opinion” in regards to this statement on the pre-tests.

Finally, the pre-tests indicated that the majority of participants (65%), either had “no opinion,” “strongly disagreed,” or “disagreed” with the statement that “LGBTQ individuals experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation when they live in communities with high levels of anti-gay prejudice;” while the vast majority (86%), indicated in post-tests that they “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with this statement.

Therefore, the results of the pre-tests are in alignment with our hypothesis that the majority of Iranians have inadequate knowledge and information about LGBTQ issues and that there is a cultural stigma related to LGBTQ identity. The results of the post-tests then indicated that after participation in the workshops, the majority of participants had a better understanding of the facts of LGBTQ identity, as well as an awareness of how the judgments and stigma’s that the community holds on to can negatively affect the emotional and mental health of Iranian LGBTQ individuals.

Verbal feedback collected by the volunteers and the project coordinator are in alignment with the pre and post test findings. One participant stated “I had never given much thought as to how the little comments I made and expressions I used made my daughter feel ashamed of her sexual orientation.” Another participant stated that she had spent the last several months begging her son to go to conversion therapy and “it wasn’t until tonight that I realized how harmful this could be to him.”

Repeatedly, participants would ask questions like, “Why is it important to come out of the closet? Can’t you just disregard your sexual urges and form a traditional marriage and have children?” or “Don’t you think speaking about homosexuality will make children and adolescents gay?” And upon leaving the workshops, many of the participants expressed gratitude and appreciation for the information that they had received and the stories that they had heard that opened their eyes and their minds to the reality of LGBTQ life. Multiple participants also expressed their desire for attending future workshops and presentations and requested to be informed of upcoming events.

A total of 213 Pre and Post tests were collected. Below is a detailed breakdown of participant’s responses to each question:

PRE-TEST OUTCOMES: N = 213

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	No opinion (0)
	N - %	N - %	N - %	N - %	N - %	N - %
Being an LGBTQ ally means that I have to go to parades and publicly speak on the subject.	44 - 21%	59 - 28%	38 - 18%	39 - 18%	16 - 7%	17 - 8%
The verbal and non-verbal messages that our community sends to LGBTQ people make no difference to their mental and emotional well-being.	34 - 16%	48 - 22.5%	31 - 15%	20 - 9%	51 - 24%	29 - 14%

When people speak publicly about being LGBTQ, it puts our children and young adults at risk of becoming gay.	24 - 11%	51 - 24%	28 - 13%	31 - 14.5%	51 - 24%	28 - 13%
Homosexuality can be cured if the person goes to therapy.	33 - 15%	55 - 25%	26 - 12%	23 - 10%	46 - 21%	30 - 14%
LGBTQ individuals experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation when they live in communities with high levels of anti-gay prejudice.	29 - 14%	45 - 21%	30 - 14%	55 - 25%	17 - 8%	37 - 17%

POST-TEST OUTCOMES: N = 213

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	No opinion (0)
	N - %	N - %	N - %	N - %	N - %	N - %
Being an LGBTQ ally means that I have to go to parades and publicly speak on the subject.	10 - 4%	11 - 5%	18 - 8%	66 - 40%	108 - 51%	0 - 0%
The verbal and non-verbal messages that our community sends to LGBTQ people make no difference to their	9 - 4%	11 - 5%	9 - 4%	63 - 29%	118 - 55%	3 - 1%

mental and emotional well-being.						
When people speak publicly about being LGBTQ, it puts our children and young adults at risk of becoming gay.	3 - 1%	11 - 5%	7 - 3%	80 - 37%	106 - 50%	6 - 3%
Homosexuality can be cured if the person goes to therapy.	4 - 2%	7 - 3%	7 - 3%	63 - 29%	126 - 59%	6 - 3%
LGBTQ individuals experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation when they live in communities with high levels of anti-gay prejudice.	106 - 49%	78 - 36%	9 - 4%	11 - 5%	2 - 1%	7 - 3%

A total of 244 signatures were collected at the workshops via the activity sign-in sheets. The demographic information that was collected is as follows:

Gender:

Males - 91

Females - 151

Trans - 2

Age:

TAY - 51

Adults - 172

Older Adults - 21

Sexual Orientation:

Lesbian - 44

Gay - 62

Bisexual - 1

Queer - 3

Heterosexual - 109

Would not disclose - 25

Country of Origin:

Iran - 139

USA - 93

South Africa - 1

UK - 5

France - 1

Japan - 1

Israel - 4

Australia - 1

Primary Language:

Persian/Farsi - 129

English - 112

Armenian - 2

Arabic - 1

## **PROJECT COSTS**

For the services described in the Statement of Work's Deliverables, the Department of Mental Health agreed to pay Consultants (Cross Cultural Expressions) a total of \$50,000 for services rendered.

## **LEASONS LEARNED**

The biggest challenge of this project was one that we anticipated, which was the very controversial nature of its subject matter for the Iranian community. Surprisingly to us, the area where this played out most significantly, was in the universities and colleges that we reached out to.

Initially, we had planned to connect with the Iranian Student Associations on college campuses, and ask them to host a few of our workshops. The project coordinator reached out to the Iranian Student Associations of the following colleges and universities in the LA area: UCLA, USC, CSUN, Pierce College, Valley College, Santa Monica College, and Glendale College. After multiple attempts to get them to speak to us about the workshops, the Iranian students' association at UCLA said that they are not interested, and we never heard back from the student associations at USC, Santa Monica College, Valley College and Pierce College.

We did receive a long email from the president of the CSUN Iranian Students Association which stated, "The issue you are raising is real and valid but there are more tangible issues such as violation of human rights, social liberties, gender inequality, religious prejudice, blind hatred toward minorities, etc. that preclude problems like LGBTQ stigmas to be properly sensed and addressed. As the president of this association I should respectfully assert that we should be focused on the aforementioned issues for the time being..." When we wrote back to them and

stated that in fact, stigmas around LGBTQ issues is directly correlated to all of the issues he addressed, we received no further response from him.

The project coordinator also had a series of conversations and exchanges with the professor at Glendale College who sponsors their Iranian club. In our final conversation, the professor stated that she would present all of the information I had given her to the club members and get back to me; however, she never got back to me or returned any of my follow-up emails.

We soon learned that in order to bring our message to Iranian students at the college/university campuses, we need to change our strategy and reach out to other on-campus personnel and organizations and ask them to partner with us in hosting our workshops. Thus, we were able to have a successful workshop at California State University Northridge (CSUN), where we reached out to their LGBTQ center and they were more than happy to host our workshop on their campus. We then promoted the workshop to the Iranian students at CSUN through flyers, email, social media and word of mouth.

The project coordinator also reached out to Professor Saba Soomekh, who teaches a class on Iranians in Los Angeles, at UCLA. Dr. Soomekh sponsored us in hosting a workshop at UCLA and made it a requirement that all of her Iranian students attend the workshop.

The lesson we learned from this is how much stigmas around LGBTQ individuals exist amongst Iranian youth. It was our incorrect assumption that Iranian young adults, specifically those attending college/universities in the Los Angeles area, would be much more receptive to the challenges of the Iranian LGBTQ community, but it turns out that we were incorrect in our assumption. We quickly learned that in order to reach Iranian students, we need to find other avenues of engagement, rather than relying on the Iranian student clubs and associations.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The idea of conducting a grass roots campaign, through the use of radio, print media, and workshops, in order to decrease stigma's related to LGBTQ issues and increase knowledge and linkage to mental health services, was very well conceived and proved to be a successful way to tackle this issue within the Iranian community in Los Angeles. However, it is clear to us that this is just the beginning of what needs to be on-going programming that will help educate and normalize this concept to this community. Due to the fact that we now have in our possession a series of workshops (that were all videotaped), six magazine articles, and twenty-six radio programs all about Iranian LGBTQ issues; it is our recommendation that continued funding is granted in order for us to disseminate all of this information on social media (i.e. via YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, twitter, telegram, and on-line magazines and podcasts). This will help get the information that we have gathered through this project to a greater number of people and will continue to allow for learning and growth within the targeted community.

## **CONCLUSION**

Overall, the data collected indicates that a significant number of Iranian community members attended the workshops, listened to the radio programs and PSA's, and read the magazine

articles. And by engaging the community in this way, it is clear that this project was able to shift the Iranian community's thinking around LGBTQ issues, provide them with correct information and with referrals to mental health services.

The pre/post tests that were collected at the workshops show that there was a significant shift in participant beliefs and knowledge about LGBTQ issues. And verbal and written feedback that we received from community members confirms that this campaign has created a substantial transformation in the perceptions that Iranians have in regards to LGBTQ individuals, as well as to the dialogue that community members are having about this subject. The information that we have collected supports and validates our conclusion that this program was a resounding and overwhelming success in accomplishing the goals and objectives that we set out to achieve.